

Message Text

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SUBJECT: PRESS STATEMENT ON U.S. CURRENT LEGISLATION
ON MEAT IMPORTS BY MINISTER OF OVERSEAS TRADE,
MR BRIAN TALBOYS.

1. THE MINISTER OF OVERSEAS TRADE, BRIAN TALBOYS, HAS
EXPRESSED IN A PRESS STATEMENT HIS STRONG CONCERN AT THE
NEWS THAT A COMMITTEE OF THE UNITED STATES HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES HAD ENDORSED A BILL TO CHANGE THE LAW
GOVERNING IMPORTS OF BEEF AND VEAL INTO THE UNITED STATES.

2. "THERE ARE A NUMBER OF LEGISLATIVE STEPS STILL
AHEAD, BUT IF THIS BILL BECAME LAW", MR TALBOYS SAID,
"IT WOULD HAVE A VERY SERIOUS EFFECT ON THE STABILITY
AND GROWTH OF NEW ZEALAND'S TRADE IN BEEF WITH THE
UNITED STATES - A TRADE WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR 45 PERCENT OF
OUR TOTAL EXPORTS OF BEEF".

3. MR TALBOYS EXPLAINED THAT THE NEW BILL HAD BEEN
PRESENTED AS AN ATTEMPT TO BALANCE THE INTERESTS OF
SUPPLYING COUNTRIES AND DOMESTIC PRODUCERS. HE SAID,
"ON THE CONTRARY THERE WOULD BE WIDE FLUCTUATIONS YEAR
BY YEAR IN THE LEVEL OF ACCESS FOR OUR BEEF. INSTEAD OF
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THE PRESENT RELATIVELY CONSTANT MARKET SITUATION,
WE WOULD BE FACED WITH A SITUATION WHERE, BECAUSE OUR
PATTERNS OF PRODUCTION ARE CLOSELY IN STEP WITH THOSE
IN THE UNITED STATES, ACCESS WOULD BE EXTREMELY LIMITED
WHEN WE HAD MOST PRODUCT TO SUPPLY AND VICE-VERSA. THAT
SORT OF VARIATION AND UNCERTAINTY COULD WELL FORCE
FARMERS IN EXPORTING COUNTRIES OUT OF THE BEEF

BUSINESS ALTOGETHER, THEREBY REDUCING POTENTIAL SUPPLIES TO WORLD MARKETS IN THE FUTURE".

4. "IT WOULD BE MOST REGRETTABLE IF THE UNITED STATES WERE TO INTRODUCE NEW IMPORT RESTRICTIONS ON BEEF AT THE VERY TIME WHEN THE UNITED STATES ITSELF IS TAKING THE INITIATIVE, IN THE CURRENT ROUND OF GATT MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS, TO DISMANTLE INTERNATIONAL BARRIERS TO TRADE IN AGRICULTURAL COMMODITIES. NEW ZEALAND IS COOPERATING CLOSELY WITH THE UNITED STATES IN THIS EFFORT".

5. MR TALBOYS SAID THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD BEEN MONITORING CLOSELY THE PROGRESS OF THIS LEGISLATION. NEW ZEALAND'S STRONG CONCERN HAD BEEN CONVEYED TO THE UNITED STATES ADMINISTRATION THROUGH ITS EMBASSY IN WASHINGTON AND ON OCCASIONS SUCH AS THE VISIT OF VICE-PRESIDENT MONDALE TO NEW ZEALAND. MR TALBOYS TOOK UP THE MATTER ONCE AGAIN DURING HIS VISIT TO WASHINGTON IN JUNE.

6. "LAST WEEK I WROTE TO VICE-PRESIDENT MONDALE TO REITERATE THE GROUNDS FOR OUR CONCERN", THE MINISTER SAID.

7. THE PROPOSED MEAT LEGISLATION WAS ALSO CRITICIZED
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THIS WEEK BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MEAT BOARD, CHARLES HILGENDORF. THE CHAIRMAN FELT THAT THE IMPACT OF THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION WOULD INCREASE WITH TIME. WHEN ASKED BY REPORTERS WHAT THE EXACT LEVEL OF INJURY WOULD BE, HILGENDORF SAID HE COULD NOT TELL EXACTLY UNTIL THE BILL REACHED ITS FINAL FORM AND A BASE LINE FOR IMPORTS WAS SET.

8. EMBASSY COMMENT:
NEW ZEALAND OFFICIALS WERE NATURALLY MOST DISAPPOINTED WHEN THEY LEARNED THAT A COUNTERCYCLICAL BILL HAD CLEARED THE HOUSE WAYS AND MEANS COMMITTEE ON AUGUST 16. OF PARTICULAR CONCERN TO THE NEW ZEALANDERS WAS AN APPARENT REVERSAL IN ADMINISTRATION POSITION AGAINST COUNTERCYCLICAL LEGISLATION TO A POSITION SUPPORTING SUCH A CONCEPT PROVIDING CERTAIN CRITERIA WERE MET. (BERGLAND-ULLMAN LETTER REPORTED REF. B). THOSE TO WHOM WE SPEAK ARE, LIKE THE MINISTER PARTICULARLY DISTURBED BY THE PROSPECT OF A FLUCTUATING MARKET AND SOME DOUBT ALL NEW ZEALAND BEEF PRODUCERS WILL BE ABLE TO ADJUST TO SUCH A PATTERN, BUT ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ACTUAL MARKET LOSS CANNOT BE PRECISELY DETERMINED AT THIS TIME.

THE PRIVATE SECTOR ECHOS THESE VIEWS BUT CANDIDLY ADMITS
THAT THE PROPOSED LEGISLATION, WHILE DISTURBING, MAY NOT
BE THE DISASTER THAT SOME ARE CLAIMING.
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